

Kootenai River Ecosystem

Responsible Agencies: U.S. Department of Energy, Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (KTOI) and Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG).

Name of Proposed Project: Kootenai River Ecosystem.

State Involved: Idaho.

Abstract: The Kootenai River is currently nutrient poor and has been so for about 25 years. Low nutrient levels are partly responsible for the low productivity found in the river and part of the reason that important fish populations are not doing well. BPA proposes to fund KTOI and IDFG to add liquid nitrogen and phosphorus to the Kootenai River in Idaho from late June through September for up to five years to replace nutrients lost to the hydrosystem. The goal of this project is to help enhance native fish populations and river health. The nutrients are expected to stimulate production in the Kootenai River's depleted food web and reverse downward trends in fish populations such as trout, kokanee, mountain whitefish, burbot, and white sturgeon. Monitoring would determine the effects of nutrients on the food chain, ecosystem, and water quality. This proposed project would be temporary and would be monitored during the application process, and re-evaluated after 3-5 years.

The project would require a temporary gravity-fed nutrient delivery system on a site near Leonia, Lincoln County, Montana. Temporary tanks on a bench above the river would release nutrients through pipes into the river. An existing access road would be improved to the tank site. The tanks would be located on private land. The pipe to the river would be on National Forest System Lands managed by the Kootenai National Forest.

Most impacts would be temporary. Some trees would be removed at the tank location. Impacts to land use, visual resources, recreation, soils, vegetation, wildlife, noise, public health and safety, cultural resources, floodplains and wetlands, and water resources would be minor. If successful, fish productivity would be improved as the nutrients stimulate the aquatic food chain.

BPA is also considering the No Action Alternative. In the No Action Alternative, BPA would not fund nutrient treatment. There would be no impacts beyond those currently occurring in the Kootenai River ecosystem.

The comments received on the preliminary environmental assessment (EA) are in Appendix A. The Final EA includes changes made to respond to the comments. Changes are underlined. Minor editorial changes or deletions are not underlined. The environmental analysis determined the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative would have no significant impacts. The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is included in this document.

For additional information, contact:

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For additional information on DOE NEPA activities, please contact Carol M. Borgstrom, Director, Office of NEPA Policy and Compliance, EH-42, U.S. Department of Energy, 1000 Independence Avenue S.W., Washington D.C. 20585, phone: 1-800-472-2756 or visit the DOE NEPA Web site at www.eh.doe.gov/nepa.